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The Influence of Public Opinion on Union Growth Between the Years 1945 to 1948 as Expressed by Editorial Attitude

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The Influence of\Public Opinion on Union Growth/
Between the Years 1945 to 1948 as Expressed
by Editorial Attitude

by

Grace (Budrys) De Santis

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Institute of
Industrial Relations of Loyola in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements
for the
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Approval Sheet

The thesis submitted by Grace (Budrys) De Santis has been read and approved by three members of the faculty of the Institute of Industrial Relations.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Industrial Relations.

February 24, 1967
Date

J. Berley
Signature of Advisor

Life

Grace (Budrys) De Santis was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, March 14, 1943.

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Abstract

This thesis is the study of the effects of public opinion on the growth of labor unions as expressed by two prominent newspapers, the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. The period studied, 1945-1948, preceeded a significant drop in the union growth rate. Excerpts in which editorial opinion was clearly expressed were chosen. The work is divided into three broad categories of events; the post-war strike waves and the resultant anti-union legislation constitute the first two categories. The third factor studied was the effect of Communist infiltration on public opinion in trade unions. The previously mentioned areas of study, plus a more general survey of other social and economic factors influencing union growth indicate that anti-union public sentiment gained strength until the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, whereupon public sentiment altered its course, becoming passive, if not sympathetic.

This thesis constitutes a portion of a study of union growth undertaken by the Institute of Industrial Relations.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The human response to an existing mood in society is action through a formalized structure, i.e., an organization. Although goals and action usually identify an organization, the composition or size of the membership may also be identifying characteristics. The shifting trends of memberships in human organizations are, therefore, avidly studied by those interested in the changing social and economic scene.

Membership rosters may ebb or swell at various times indicating the strength of the reaction from various sectors of the public in response to the performance of the organization in question. Reasons for such changes are certainly of interest to the leaders of a group, to students of an organization, and in certain instances, to the general public. In the case of organized labor the former three categories are well defined. Labor leaders are certainly very eager to learn what causes a rise or decline in the membership roles of unions. The public in general can be said to have a certain degree of interest in labor unions; however, that portion of society employing laborers is greatly concerned about the activities of union organizers and the resulting effects. Students of organized

labor have devoted much energy to answering the questions encountered in examining the growth of unions. Many theories have been preponed in an attempt to relate the growth to specific factors.

The purpose of this project is to explore the relationship between a single factor, public opinion, and the growth of organized labor. The effect of public opinion on union growth was indicated by John Dunlop¹ and Joseph Shister.² Specifically, the intent of this thesis is to examine the effects of public opinion on union growth during the period 1945 to 1948. The selection of a three year span is in conformity with the study presently being conducted by the Institute of Industrial Relations on the determinants of union growth and the concomitant variation in union membership. The year 1948 marks a substantial change in union growth, as compared to the years immediately preceeding and succeeding the year 1948.³ The events prior to this year are being studied to provide insight into the reasons why the downturn occurred.

The historical data for the period has been compiled from the works of noted labor economists and historians. The

¹John T. Dunlop, "The Development of Labor Organizations," in Insight into Labor Issues, ed. Lester and Shister, 1948, p. 190-191.

²Joseph Shister, "The Logic of Union Growth," Journal of Political Economy, Oct., 1953, p. 413-414.

³Handbook of Labor Statistics. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1965, p. 345.

information on union membership for these years is based on a study performed by Irving Bernstein⁴ who, in turn, established his examination principally from an unpublished analysis done by Leo Wolman. The union growth factors have been developed by Joseph Shister, Irving Bernstein, and John Dunlop, and further refined by Julius Rezler.

The bulk of the research has been comprised through an analysis of the editorial attitudes of two influential dailies, the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. The method of this study is to examine and interpret the editorial attitude as expressed through editorials, signed articles, and letters to the editor.⁵ News articles were not used since they do not exhibit editorial opinion and should not do so. Editorials and signed articles on the other hand are recognized by their criticism, advice, and tone, instead of unbiased news reporting. The New York Times provides an Index of material published in that newspaper which facilitated the location of pertinent data. The articles reviewed were those contained under the headings of "labor" and "labor unions." The research of editorial attitudes of the Tribune required a scrutiny of the daily publication for

⁴Irving Bernstein, "The Growth of American Unions," American Economic Review, June, 1954, p. 304.

⁵It is recognized by the author that letters to the editor may appear at the whim of the editor. However, some letters directly opposed to the opinions expressed in the paper seem to express qualitative if not quantitative reactions of the readers.

the four year period. All articles relating to organized labor or the labor movement in general were read. The use of sampling was eliminated by the scrutiny of all material related to the thesis topic as published by the two newspapers. Selection of the excerpts appearing in the thesis was based principally on the fact that they, more than the others, expressed a definite point of view rather than reporting factual information. The newspaper was chosen as an indicator of public opinion because it has established its role as more than a purveyor of social, political, and economic information. It is also a barometer which can inhibit or compel social action. For the purpose of this thesis we must assume the premise that editorials and letters to the editors reflect the public opinion as related to union growth and the issues involved therein.

However, to elaborate on the basis of selection, we might note that these two newspapers enjoy a large circulation in their respective geographic regions, which becomes increasingly important when one considers the huge union membership in New York and Chicago. Newspapers of other regions were not chosen for various reasons; however, let it suffice to say that union concentration in these two cities is substantial and that other geographic regions have commonly been beset by relatively local problems. Furthermore, it should be noted that the two newspapers utilized have already provided the basis for previous research done at the Institute of Industrial Relations

in the thesis "Editorial Attitude toward Unionism with regard to Important Labor Issues, the Years 1914-1921 Inclusive," by Eugene Monroe.

The only other work of similar nature, to the writer's knowledge, is a thesis by Anthony Brzyski done at New York University for the Economics Department, entitled "Editorial Policy of the New York Times to Labor, 1930-1947."

CHAPTER II

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The increasingly important role played by organized labor in the twentieth century constantly generates interest for students of American labor, as indicated by one scholar of the labor movement:

Of the organizations which stand in the foreground of our modern society, none is regarded and analyzed with more interest and anxiety than the labor union because of its functions and the political and economic power it exercises.¹

The concern of this paper is a short span of time in the history of union growth, narrowed by only one factor - that of the influence of public opinion. Although the period of immediate concern of this paper is the four year span immediately following the war, a brief discussion of the pre-war period might provide some interesting background information. With the coming of the New Deal came a redress of the balance of power on the union and management scale in favor of the unions. It was generally acknowledged by the public and its representatives in Washington that labor legislation relatively favorable to

¹Julius Rezler, Union Growth Reconsidered (New York: The Kossuth Foundation, Inc., 1961), p. 1.

unions would serve to improve labor relations; therefore, a series of measures were adopted between 1933 and 1938.² In retrospect the major piece of legislation of this era was the Wagner Act of 1935. Legislation plus a tremendous organizing spurt during the latter half of the 1930's, during which the automobile and steel industries were organized, gave organized labor a new position in society.

It must be noted, however, that organizing such large portions of the labor force produced a certain amount of strife and industrial disputes. The public discontent that arose at this time was not immediately dealt with, however, because of President Roosevelt's convictions:

In spite of both labor disturbances and a growing demand for modification of the Wagner Act, however, Roosevelt was to remain convinced that the increased strength of unions would in time lead to greater industrial stability.³

The inception of World War II created an atmosphere of nationalism in the United States which probably has not been equaled since. National defense needs required the pledge of loyalty from both labor and management. This is not to say that either party gave up any intentions of protecting its interests during the period. However, the short supply of labor in certain areas forced employers to deal with unions,

²Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960), p. 286.

³Dulles, p. 287.

bringing unions and managements into closer relationships and reating a stabilized membership.⁴

The War Labor Board was created by President Roosevelt in January of 1942 to provide a meeting ground for management and labor and to avoid unfavorable legislation pending in Congress. Initially, labor was pleased with the War Labor Board, largely because of its approval of union security. It created the maintenance of membership shop through which the union could keep discipline throughout the term of the contract. A provision was also made to protect the rights of individual members by allowing them a fifteen day escape hatch at which time they could withdraw from the union.

The assurance of industrial peace initiated by the maintenance of membership clause was offset within a few months by the "Little Steel Formula." Due to the demands of the employees of the so-called Little Steel Companies (Republic, National, Youngstown), the War Labor Board created a formula that was to become the guiding principle for wage determination throughout the wartime period. According to this formula, wage adjustments were not to exceed a fifteen per cent rise in cost of living from January 1, 1941, to May 1, 1942. Although wages certainly remained stable while wartime price controls were in force, labor used its ingenuity. Fringe benefits were sought by

⁴Philip Taft, Organized Labor in American History (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 538.

organized labor and were severely restricted by the War Labor Board in order to avoid worker protests. Even though the War Labor Board was not popular in labor circles, it did accomplish its mammoth task with perspicuity:

Between January 12, 1942, and August 18, 1945, the National War Labor Board closed 17,650 dispute cases involving approximately 12.2 million workers. In over 95 per cent of these cases, the decision of the Board and its agents resolved the dispute without without further threat to production.⁵

The labor picture was a relatively favorable one during the war; however, strikes did occur, often putting the war effort in peril according to the press; the coal strikes were considered to be especially reprehensible.

The Smith-Connally Act was passed over President Roosevelt's veto in an effort to restrict strikes. It provided for a thirty day notice followed by a strike vote. As a final measure, it also provided for plant seizure if the strike interfered with the war effort. Nevertheless, the effect of the bill was to bureaucratize striking instead of diminishing the incidence of strikes.

Organized labor emerged from the war as a solidified and respectable segment of society. Labor's cooperation and achievements were praised by military leaders as well as political leaders. Nevertheless, unions did not rest on their laurels. It was obvious that both managements and organized

⁵Taft, p. 560.

labor had come out of the war determined to rectify the injustices that each party felt it had suffered because of the wage and price stabilization. Both industry and organized labor were psychologically and financially prepared to battle it out. Foster Rhea Dulles, the historian, stated that besides feeling deprived of their respective rights as a result of war-time controls, both parties had grown rusty in the practice of collective bargaining.⁶

By the end of 1945 the War Labor Board was dissolved in favor of the National Wage Stabilization Board.⁷ The function of this tripartite agency, composed of management, labor, and government leaders, was the indirect control of wages and prices. Nevertheless, the war had officially ended some months before and organized labor felt it was time to demand its due. The strike wave broke with a resounding crash. Four of the largest sectors of organized labor almost simultaneously made demands, all of which resulted in work stoppages, beginning with the automobile workers dispute to the steel workers strike, the coal strike and the railroad strike. The result of these strikes, occurring simultaneously, was a show of tremendous power in the hands of unions. The public was shocked; but,

⁶Dulles, p. 357.

⁷Many of the observations made in the following survey of facts will be documented later in the paper as they appear in the form of direct quotations.

with the economy in a state of turmoil and civilian post-war resources not yet assessed, organized labor had the obvious advantage.

Although all factions of society seemed to be clamoring for the removal of wage and price controls, the actual removal of controls on November 9, 1946, signaled a second round of industrial disputes. The United Auto Workers again led the fight for higher wages by striking first. The railroad workers, coal miners, and telephone workers soon following suit. The second round of labor disputes, following so closely on the heels of the first round, enraged the public. The nation had not totally recovered from the disorder caused by wartime conditions and was not about to endure what were felt to be unnecessary hardships. Other issues such as Portal-to-Portal pay demands added fat to the fire, because it seemed that labor was not satisfied to bargain collectively. Many court cases were coming to light in which workers claimed pay for time spent preparing for the job on the premises. The public demanded a law to curb labor's powerful demands. The House of Representatives prepared a punitive bill which would have taken industrial relations back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The Senate produced a bill curbing union power, but it did not contain punitive measures as did the former bill. The Labor-Management Relations Act, which was a composite of the Senate and House bills, was passed into law on June 23, 1947.

Labor leaders called it a slave-labor bill and vowed to fight it. The public seemed to have tasted revenge sufficiently and decided to reduce pressure on its representatives in Washington after the Act went into effect a few months later. Some of the clauses of the Taft-Hartley Act were readily apparent to be doomed to failure. The trend of thought seemed to have been that labor had gone too far in its demands, but that the Taft-Hartley Act would not be a satisfactory solution either. Some of the provisions were recognized as "unworkable;" others were considered repugnant and insulting to unions, the case in point being the communist affidavit. Since other organizations in American society were not required to sign such affidavits, unions shouted cries of discrimination. The charge of "Communist" was often rightly applied to certain labor union during this period; however, the accusation was often unjustly applied to other unions.

The year 1948 was anti-climactic in comparison to the previous year; after labor's initial shock, the Taft-Hartley Act was found to be tolerable in practice if not in theory. The Democratic Party, however, regretted its hasty censure of organized labor and promised to rectify the inequity of the situation if unions would support the Democratic Party in the next election. The unions found the use of political pressure to be advantageous. Organized labor took advantage of its newly discovered position as a political pressure group instead

of using the initially contemplated more violent measures such as strikes. The threatened third wave of strikes never materialized.

CHAPTER III

WAGE DEMANDS AND STRIKES

The first wave

The post-war period brought more problems than anticipated. The predicted unemployment problem occurred immediately after V-J Day. Certain segments of the public, apparently calloused by the war, did not view the unemployment situation as particularly troublesome to the economy as a whole with little thought of vital needs of the men returning from the war. The Tribune editorialized along the following lines:

With plenty of manpower, plenty of raw materials, and greatly expanded production capacity, we don't need to fear inflation.¹

The New York Times, on the other hand, expressed concern over the unemployment situation:

Much is being said as to what the government ought to give to labor during the forthcoming period of reconversion unemployment. Little is being said as to how to speed the reconversion period and enable industry to reabsorb those who have been or will be rebased from war work and those who presently will be taking off their military uniforms.²

¹Chicago Tribune, September 9, 1945, p. 12.

²New York Times, September 3, 1945, p. 22.

The severity of unemployment became more evident as indicated by the statistics on unemployment gathered by the Census Bureau and reported by the New York Times:

It is estimated that in the week of August 5-11 there were 830,000 unemployed and that for the week of₃ September 2-8 there was an increase of 900,000.³

The public seemed for the most part to be in sympathy with the working man's problems at this time; this letter to the Times exhibits such concern:

In a recent editorial you opposed unemployment compensation for Federal workers. I wonder if you have any conception of the suffering in the ranks--of those who, having worked long hours for four years with inadequate pay, now find themselves suddenly without jobs.⁴

The editorial answer to the letter indicated a misunderstanding on the part of the reader; however, it does show public concern on the problem of economic hardship and unemployment. The unemployment problem was for the most part temporary, however, due to disorder in the labor market rather than to a shortage of jobs. As this issue solved itself, the true concern of unions became obvious. They felt it was high time to reap some of the rewards gained by their employers due to high war-time production. The public was not in sympathy with organized labor on the issue of wage increases; although, it could certainly be said to have been on the side of organized labor

³New York Times, September 25, 1945, p. 15.

⁴New York Times, October 12, 1945, p. 22.

in its efforts to avoid unemployment. The difference in the public attitude toward unemployment and the wage issue is readily apparent when one considers the effect of both issues on the public. In the unemployment issue the public could afford to be noble and demand employment for everyone. However, they were not so eager to concur with the workers' desire for higher wages if this led to strikes and perhaps higher prices. As long as benefits given to workers were not at the expense of the public's pocketbook, they certainly could afford to be righteous. The Tribune expressed what seemed to be the general tenor of public thought on this issue:

What was needed was the prompt expansion of the production of goods, moderation in wage demands, and economy in government.....The idea that there can be increased⁵wages without increases in prices is nonsense.

The Times expressed its opposition to raising wages in an editorial:

But while the basic wage rates during the war increased from January, 1941, by only 20 per cent, average hourly earnings increased 53 per cent and average weekly earnings, 77 per cent. It is this last increase that unions are trying to freeze, though in the same period the Government figures show an increase in the cost-of-living index of only 28 per cent.⁶

Although the government received a great deal of criticism on its handling of the post-war economy, it had little other

⁵Chicago Tribune, December 4, 1945, p. 12.

⁶New York Times, September 17, 1945, p. 18.

recourse. The government was first of all unprepared to replace wartime wage and price controls with modified peacetime controls and unwilling to abandon controls completely. Labor unions, on the other hand, were not willing to wait for the government to act.

The President attempted to conciliate unions and managements by appointing neutral fact-finding boards to settle wage disputes. The decisions of the boards were in most cases unsatisfactory to both parties. The major management objection was to discussions by either the government or unions of its ability to pay, which it felt to be an infringement on its right to manage and its privacy. Unions felt the ability to pay should be a matter of discussion because of greatly increased industrial profits. The noted labor economist, Joel Seidman, backed labor's position with this observation: "Under the influence of rising prices, high levels of production and sales, and diminished taxes, corporate profits were soaring to the highest point in the history of the country."⁷ General Secretary-Treasurer Julius Emspak (of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America) concurred with this outlook in a letter to the Times remarking on the negative outcome of growing profits. "Despite glowing profit reports, the cost

⁷ Joel Seidman, American Labor from Defense to Reconversion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 241.

of living continues to mount in an inflationary crescendo."⁸ Nevertheless, both unions and the public demanded an economy free of government controls. Professor Charles J. Walsh of Fordham University wrote to the Times advocating a hastened return to a normal state of affairs. He noted that an economy which is half free and half controlled is neescient.⁹ The controls were finally removed because of pressure from all parties concerned and because the government felt that widespread unemployment would counteract excessive wage increases.¹⁰

Price increases which occurred after the lifting of controls had the effect of wiping out earlier real wage gains made by unions. Many appraisals of the cost of living and wage-price issues were being made by all parties concerned, the government, unions, and management. The Nathan survey gained more notoriety than any other. According to Joel Seidman:

The CIO relied heavily on an economic analysis made for it by Robert R. Nathan and his associates, who argued that a substantial wage increase without a general price increase was possible, justifiable, and essential from the point of view of the economy as a whole as well as that of the individual worker. Nathan asserted that a 23 per cent increase was required to bring real weekly earnings back to the January, 1945, level.¹¹

⁸New York Times, October 11, 1946, p. 22.

⁹New York Times, October 20, 1946, p. 12, IV.

¹⁰Taft, p. 564.

¹¹Seidman, pp. 244-5.

Another academician, Professor John Black of Harvard University, found the Nathan report to be detrimental to the economy, if followed. He predicted a spiral of wage increases resulting in an economic crash.¹²

When all wage and price controls were removed, unions saw their chance to make up for what they felt they had lost during the war. Similar thinking on the part of management, however, resulted in irreconcilable goals and a strong emotional involvement of each party attempting to rectify the situation.

Professor Seidman summarily described the situation in these words:

While profits were high before mass unemployment undercut labor's bargaining power--now was the time, unions believed, to force wage rates up to compensate for the loss of overtime earnings. Where factionalism or rival unionism existed, success would go to the group that produced wage increases while the opportunity existed. Moreover, what about the employers who had yielded to the War Labor Board under pressure who had not yet reconciled themselves to unionism and collective bargaining? They would not abide by War Labor Board decisions now that the hostilities were over, and public opinion would hardly support the President in plant seizures, the only weapon of enforcement. A labor leader who talked of a no-strike pledge under such circumstances was inviting repudiation and defeat.¹³

The early months of 1946 were appraised by the New York Times in this statement: "strike has followed strike during the past few months..."¹⁴ Supporting this point of view, Philip Taft

¹²New York Times, December 17, 1946, p. 30.

¹³Seidman, p. 217.

¹⁴New York Times, May 4, 1946, p. 10.

had the following observation to make:

This was the beginning of a twelve-month series of labor-management conflicts unmatched for their 'scope and intensity' in any comparable period in American history. In the period between August 15, 1945, and August 14, 1946, 4,630 work stoppages took place. They involved 4.9 million workers who lost 119.8 million man-days of work, or 1.62 per cent of all work time in the period.¹⁵

There were actually two obvious waves of strikes. The first round occurred in the winter of 1945-46, and the second occurred the following winter, 1946-47. Both waves of strikes were led by large and influential unions. An article by Louis Stark observed that the "squeaking axle gets the grease"¹⁶ The author cited the railroad, coal, and auto workers' unions as the most clamorous, militant, and greedy. The benefits produced by the strikes were far reaching momentarily because they set standards for smaller industries and unions to follow. However, their effect on the public and government caused a whiplash effect. The public used its only sure weapon against the united front of labor unions; it retaliated by supporting anti-labor legislation. The strikes which produced this effect received much public attention. The editorial comments were constant and unanimous in asserting that unions were demanding unjust wage increases. Joseph Rayback concisely characterized the attitude of the people during this turbulent post-war

¹⁵Taft, p. 567.

¹⁶New York Times, April 7, 1946, p. 9, IV

period in these few words:

The postwar anti-labor movement had its foundation in the widespread and large-scale strikes of 1945-46 and the wage drives of 1946-47 which irritated a public--far too busy converting itself to peacetime living to bother with the relevancy of issues raised by unions--which assumed, as the press constantly reiterated, that most of its economic problems were caused by labor.¹⁷

The first round of strikes began later in the fall of 1945. In the beginning of 1946, the industrial relations picture became dismal. The Tribune assessed the situation in terms of the number on strike in the following editorial:

At last report 400,000 industrial workers were on strike in this country. Strikes intended to paralyze the steel industry with its 700,000 employees, the manufacture of electrical equipment with 200,000 employees are scheduled for the middle of the present month. A telephone strike, involving a quarter of a million men and women, is also threatened and another in the farm machinery plants. The General Motors strike is already well into its second month.¹⁸

When the United Auto Workers led the first round of strikes, the public was somewhat taken aback by the intensity with which the union was going about achieving its goal; however, the reaction was comparatively minor in view of the distress caused by later disputes. The Times expressed its opinion in the form of a recommendation to observe the President's wage policy. This question is an example of the initial reaction of the public to the strikes and wage demands:

¹⁷Joseph Rayback, A History of American Labor (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1959), p. 394.

¹⁸Chicago Tribune, January 8, 1946, p. 8.

Is it evidence of a desire to destroy unions when management offers wage increases within the limits of a national policy announced by the President, but refuses wage increases which will mean higher prices to consumers?¹⁹

The Tribune was sympathetic to at least one union during the beginning of this action filled year. It even praised the union leadership in a tongue in cheek manner:

The Tribune has had frequent occasion to criticize shortsighted union leadership...It may be that this criticism is having constructive results. Whatever considerations intervened in the settlement at the (stock) yards, we feel that the union officials have acted wisely. We congratulate them.²⁰

At the beginning of that year several major strikes were pending, making the public somewhat skeptical as to what it should expect of the unions in the United States. Such ambivalence is still apparent in this early editorial on the steel strike:

A strike of 700,000 is threatening for January 14, if a CIO demand for \$2. a day wage increase is denied. President Truman has called upon the union to show patience until a fact-finding board can determine whether an increase in the price of steel can be granted the producers...We do not believe that they, the union, will interfere with the greater achievement in production, in efficiency, or technology, for by doing so, they would injure those whose interests they represent.²¹

The editorial explained why it was opposed to fact-finding boards by pointing out that they are "projecting into steel and

¹⁹New York Times, January 20, 1946, p. 8, IV.

²⁰New York Times, January 27, 1946, p. 8, IV.

²¹Chicago Tribune, January 6, 1946, p. 20.

automobile controversies a very definite spearhead of socialism; given time, they may go most of the way toward a virtual socialization of American industry.²²

The fact-finding committee appointed by the President to investigate the steel dispute recommended a 19.5 cents an hour wage increase, the same amount as recommended in the Auto Workers strike. U. S. Steel rejected the proposed amount, and the union struck as planned. The strike affected 750,000 workers and 85 per cent of the industry. The final settlement was reached one month later with the union getting an 18.5 cent wage increase.²³

As the number of strikes grew in scale, making them hard to ignore, the public grew less ambivalent and more negative in its reaction to the strikes. The strikes that directly affected the public, of course, produced even more hostile reactions. The coal strike, for instance, aroused the public to voice its opinion on both the strike and Mr. Lewis, the President of the coal miners' union. One editorial in the Tribune stated that, "this ought to be the last nation-wide coal strike and it will be if Congress does its duty,"²⁴ implying that the government should take some action to restrain Lewis. An especially sardonic

²²Chicago Tribune, January 6, 1946, p. 20.

²³Taft, p. 572.

²⁴Chicago Tribune, May 8, 1946, p. 18.

letter aimed at Lewis had this to say:

Now that 'Eyebrows' Lewis has grudgingly permitted us to enjoy the comfort of heated homes until next March, I think it about time that industry and private home owners see the light and switch from coal to oil or gas as soon as possible to do so. As the demand for coal diminishes, so will the power and ego of Lewis.²⁵

Most letters about Mr. Lewis fell into this category; however, one letter was published by the Tribune glowing in praise for Mr. Lewis:

Lewis has always proved himself the most able leader this country has ever seen. That's why he is hated by the New Deal. That's why the administration in Washington is trying to hold the strike on.²⁶

The New York Times showed more concern over the nation-wide after effects of the coal strike in the following editorial:

If the 18½ cent an hour pattern is increased in an effort to buy off the coal strike, other labor unions will insist upon obtaining additional raises and these, too, have to be reflected in higher prices.²⁷

As much criticism was directed at Mr. Lewis as at the actual strike. The Tribune found much to criticize in Mr. Lewis' attitude. In an editorial headlined "Strike or Insurrection?", the Tribune found Mr. Lewis' interpretation of the meaning of collective bargaining totally objectionable.²⁸

²⁵Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1946, p. 22.

²⁶Chicago Tribune, May 8, 1946, p. 18.

²⁷Chicago Tribune, May 22, 1946, p. 20.

²⁸Chicago Tribune, May 8, 1946, p. 18.

In another editorial the Tribune seems to have been thoroughly disgusted with Lewis' tactics. It warned in a threatening tone: "Mr. Lewis will be well advised not to challenge the nation in its present mood. He can't win such a contest. He can land behind bars."²⁹

Before an agreement could be reached, Lewis became involved in a new dispute concerning vacation payments. The resulting series of disagreements with the government caused Lewis to inform the miners that an impasse was reached; the government considered this, in effect, a strike call. Lewis was subsequently held in contempt of court and fined \$10,000 personally, with the union being fined \$3.5 million. An appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court brought a diminished fine of \$700,000 for the union, but the same fine for Lewis. He was forced to call off the strike and pay the fine upon threat of being forced to pay the initial fine.³⁰

The railroad strike, which occurred at the same time as the coal strike, was also severely injurious to organized labor's public image. The Tribune found this occasion to be appropriate for chastising both unions:

²⁹Chicago Tribune, November 18, 1946, p. 18.

³⁰Taft, p. 575.

The government has taken over the operation of the coal mines and the railroads in an effort to prevent the paralysis of the economic life.

These unions are monopolies. All of the members of each of the monopolies are capable of acting, and do act, in unison to achieve their objectives by bringing suffering to all of the people.³¹

The Tribune found concurrence among its readers; this letter was published at a later date: "Why not apply some of the methods used in restricting the great capitalistic combines of the past to controlling the great, and almost, unrestrained labor monopolies of the present?"³² The New York Times placed the blame on lenient legislation, reinforcing the growing dissatisfaction with the Wagner Act. The following editorial excerpt observed, "no essential industry is free today from the threat of being completely shut down unless it complies with a series of demands."³³

The extent of public disapproval of the railroad strike can be discerned from the reaction of some merchants in Florida who refused to sell food to railroad workers on strike.³⁴ A letter from one of the strikers, published by the Tribune, exposed the other side of the coin:

³¹Chicago Tribune, May 23, 1946, p. 18.

³²Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1946, p. 22.

³³New York Times, May 13, 1946, p. 20.

³⁴New York Times, May 26, 1946, p. 24.

Every railroad man knows that the retirement provisions as set forth in the railroad retirement act, are wholly inadequate...the railroad worker cannot retire until he reaches the age of 65, and then he will not because he just can't see where \$120 a month will give him and his wife the living they are certainly entitled to after 45 years of hard service.³⁵

Most major labor disputes were settled according to government proposed wage increases. The public, it seems, was willing to forgive and forget as long as industrial peace was to prevail. In retrospect we find that the short period of calm in the summer of 1946 was really the eye of the storm. The spirit of industrial peace was to last until the winter of 1946, when Walter Reuther (who was to be elected to the presidency of the United Automobile Workers Union during this strike) proudly announced that the UAW would lead the nation in a second round of strikes. This prospect thoroughly enraged the public. Reuther based his wage demands on the report of a former government economist, which stated that, "on the basis of estimated earnings for 1947, business can support a 25 per cent increase in wages."³⁶ When the government suggested that Reuther modify some of his demands, he accused the government of siding with management. The New York Times did not agree with this contention and instead found the fault lying with organized labor.

³⁵Chicago Tribune, May 6, 1946, p. 14.

³⁶New York Times, December 13, 1946, p. 22.

"This explanation overlooks entirely the pressure for price increases created by the large wage increases demanded and obtained by the CIO unions themselves last spring."³⁷

The second wave

Organized labor disregarded the menacing signs of public disapproval and plunged into preparations for a second campaign of strikes. The Tribune warned the coal miners that a strike would bring calamity.

If the coal union forces a further increase in wages in the negotiations soon to start, it will inevitably bring higher prices for coal and offer further inducements to coal economy, the use of substituting fuels, bankruptcy for coal mines, and unemployment for coal miners.³⁸

In another editorial the Tribune pointed out the gravity of a nation-wide strike, adding another warning:

A strike in a single mine or group of mines can be troublesome and costly to the country, but cannot paralyze it. A simultaneous strike in all the coal fields is insurrection and as such, must be forbidden under heavy penalty.³⁹

Public opinion, as expressed in a letter to the Tribune, objects to all strikes and strikers, showing the lack of patience of the public with the situation.

³⁷New York Times, October 22, 1946, p. 24.

³⁸Chicago Tribune, January 19, 1947, p. 20.

³⁹Chicago Tribune, March 8, 1947, p. 10.

When a union, a group that hasn't a nickel invested in a business, sets up itself as the dictators as to who shall work or who shall not work in that business, it is pure usurpation and it becomes a group of racketeers.⁴⁰

When the inopportune proposal was made to pay the mine workers for time lost during their last strike, the public was indignant, as this letter to the Tribune will demonstrate:

The proposal of Robert L. Gordon, state director of labor, to pay 3½ million dollars to Illinois coal miners for the time they spent in idleness during John L. Lewis' 'no contract no work' strike a year ago is wrong legally and scandalous morally.⁴¹

The disregard by Lewis of the court ruling forbidding a strike caused much antagonism toward the mine workers specifically and unions in general. "Mr. Lewis has succeeded in getting most of his miners out of the mines despite a Supreme Court ruling forbidding him to do so."⁴² Lewis was subsequently heavily fined for contempt of court, again providing a great deal of negative publicity at an especially inopportune time.

Few strikes escaped the censure of the press during this period. The railroad workers' strike received this comment from the press:

The additional billion dollars sought by the railroad unions would not move an extra pound of frate (sic) anywhere in the country. It would be a tax on all frate (sic) users for the benefit of a relatively small group of railroad workers, many of whom would be paid for not working.⁴³

⁴⁰Chicago Tribune, April 23, 1947, p. 18.

⁴¹Chicago Tribune, May 15, 1947, p. 24.

⁴²New York Times, April 9, 1947, p. 24.

⁴³Chicago Tribune, July 8, 1947, p. 12.

However, the Tribune also published the miners' side of the story in a letter from one of the strikers explaining his motivation for striking. "Rather than wage increases, most of us would rather see price control work. But as that is a failure, all we want now is a salary that will keep up with rising prices!"⁴⁴

The UAW strike incurred the wrath of the Tribune to the extent that an editorial leveled the most serious insult that the Tribune had in store--communist affiliation.⁴⁵ Later in the year when the UAW struck Ford, the Tribune again published editorials with obvious contempt for the motives of the strikers and their leaders.

The labor war lords are not now challenging the constitutionality of the act; they are asserting their defiance of it and for the people's representatives in Congress who enacted it. (The law referred to is the Taft-Hartley Act.)⁴⁶

Public opinion as voiced by one individual's letter to the Tribune offered some drastic solutions to the UAW activities:

Michigan has been disgraced by city officials who say, 'we are umpires, not strike breakers.' Umpires are needed in games, but they are not needed in cases of burglary or strike violence. It would take but a small amount of effective shooting to bring to an end the criminally conducted strikes that have afflicted our state and nation for so many years.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Chicago Tribune, April 25, 1947, p. 12.

⁴⁵Chicago Tribune, February 16, 1947, p. 20.

⁴⁶Chicago Tribune, August 7, 1947, p. 16.

⁴⁷Chicago Tribune, October 1, 1947, p. 6.

The New York Times had relatively favorable comments to make about the settlement of the steel strike in the midst of activity concerning the passage of the Taft-Hartley Bill.

Undoubtedly there are some things to be said in favor of this agreement. For one thing, it obviously is not as serious a threat to inflation as the original demands would have been, had they been met. For another thing, it has been unaccompanied by two of the worst evils associated with the general round of wage demands a year ago. One of these widespread stoppages was in the country's basic industries, the other was the ill-starred intervention of Government through its so-called Fact-Finding boards, which purported to say how much these industries could afford to pay in the way of higher wages.⁴⁸

The telephone workers strike caused a great deal of comment in the Chicago Tribune. One editorial censured the government for not stopping the strike.

Congress, which used to jump over the stick every time Mr. Roosevelt cried emergency, now has a real emergency on its hands and is proceeding with its routine business. Since nothing can be expected of the executive, Congress should drop its other business and enact a utility anti-strike law immediately.⁴⁹

Another editorial expressed a great deal of vehemence and advocated government intervention. "The nation's telephone communication system has been paralyzed by what is called a strike. It should be called a conspiracy against the American people."⁵⁰

Letters to the editor varied in tone. For instance, this letter

⁴⁸Chicago Tribune, April 23, 1947, p. 24.

⁴⁹Chicago Tribune, April 17, 1947, p. 20.

⁵⁰Chicago Tribune, April 8, 1947, p. 14.

to the Tribune seemed to ask a sincere question: "How long is a long-suffering public supposed to wait for this outrageous strike against us to end?"⁵¹ The following letters cited here came from people directly involved in the strike. One employee of the telephone company expressed what was probably a common sentiment:

Can you see the humiliation of crawling back to work now? I have wished for a long time that we could all return to work honorably and respectably, together.⁵²

Another letter is from the wife of a striker, clearly opposed to the strike:

I think a lot of them are using very poor judgement in allowing themselves to be coerced into strikes by a few hotheads, or would-be 'big-shots.' I only hope that these ill-advised employees will not spoil things for the rest of us who have no kick coming.⁵³

Ironically, a union at the Tribune struck on November 26, 1947, and continued to strike throughout the following year. The Tribune, however, did not change its editorial policy toward labor as a result. The newspaper did not comment on the situation, except to apologize for its poorly printed format. It did, however, print many letters from its subscribers commending it for continuing to operate in spite of the strike.

The appeals of unions in the form of wage demands and threatened strikes during 1946 found a public that was

⁵¹Chicago Tribune, April 25, 1947, p. 12.

⁵²Chicago Tribune, April 25, 1947, p. 12.

⁵³Chicago Tribune, April 27, 1947, p. 22.

unreceptive to such impositions. People were not well disposed to the prospect of suffering further inconveniences imposed by unions. Public sentiment, as expressed by the following letters to the editor of the Tribune, was highly antagonistic toward labor.

Let any man strike who will. Merely let other men, if they so desire, to apply for and take the jobs of the strikers...Let the law of supply and demand freely operate in work and you will see men paid what they are worth.⁵⁴

Another reader had this opinion of his fellow working men:

Why should thousands of people, who work the year around, pay their taxes, and receive small incomes, be kicked in the teeth twice--once thru (sic) taxes to maintain relief role for strikers and second, thru (sic) high prices because of the strikers' greed?⁵⁵

The right to strike was severely challenged by the public. A Tribune reader asked the following question:

Wherein lies the right to strike when it is collusion or grouping together of many individuals in organized bodies to restrain trade, destroy private property, and interfere with that basic right of the freedom of man to work when and where he chooses and at his own contract?⁵⁶

The New York Times stated that, "nearly all strikes are strikes against the public." It further suggested a remedy:

⁵⁴Chicago Tribune, June 6, 1946, p. 18.

⁵⁵New York Times, June 2, 1946, p. 20.

⁵⁶Chicago Tribune, May 21, 1946, p. 10.

It is surely time that we removed the positive encouragement to strike in existing Federal legislation, (the Wagner Act) and in a lax local enforcement which permits strikers to prevent even former workers who wish to do so, from peaceably continuing at their jobs.⁵⁷

In another editorial the Times remarked on the "one-sided" legislation benefitting labor, suggesting that restrictions be put on union activities.⁵⁸ Professor Sumner Slichter seemed to be a voice in the wilderness in his admonitions. He said: "any attempt to forbid strikes or to impose compulsory arbitration would only make the ultimate situation incomparably worse than the present one."⁵⁹ Most editorial excerpts seem to follow the line of thought that unions have been exercising too many rights and exhibiting too much power. Much of the negative feeling seems to be directed against the Wagner Act, which was at this time felt to be too lenient. Suggestions to repeal this law or pass new limiting legislation were few at first, but gained much strength among the various antagonistic groups with the menace of prolonged strikes.

After a fairly quiet fall, December brought the year, 1946, to a climactic ending. The Secretary of Labor, Mr. Schwollenbach, reported that "profits far more than increased wages are responsible for the present high cost of living."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ New York Times, May 10, 1946, p. 18.

⁵⁸ New York Times, February 10, 1946, p. 22.

⁵⁹ New York Times, January 16, 1946, p. 22.

⁶⁰ New York Times, December 4, 1947, p. 4.

This report aroused organized labor. The vice-president of the CIO demanded a third round of strikes. The third series of industrial disputes never materialized, however. Actually, the first two waves of strikes and wage demands had sufficiently incited the public and its representatives to take legal measures against the organized labor movement.

CHAPTER IV

LEGISLATIVE REACTION

The Smith-Connally Act

One of the first pieces of negative labor legislation which had an ominous foreboding for organized labor occurred immediately prior to the period under examination. The Smith-Connally Act passed in 1943 was a measure meant to restrict strikes during the period of hostilities.

The strikes that presented a problem during the wartime period plus the agitation of anti-union employers encouraged the passage of the Smith-Connally Bill. Dulles describes the measure in these words:

The bill provided, in the first instance, statutory authority for the War Labor Board. In the event that the board's intervention in a labor dispute proved unsuccessful, the President was then empowered to take over control of any plant or industry where a halt in production threatened the war effort, with criminal penalties for any persons who thereafter instigated or promoted a strike.¹

John L. Lewis, President of the coal miners, immediately made use of that part of the provision requiring that a strike

¹Dulles, p. 38.

be announced thirty days before it commences. This prompted the Times to make the following observation: "This is the result of one of the stupidest pieces of legislation, for the Smith-Connally Act will doubtless point to his (Lewis') denunciation as an excuse for preserving this absurd provision."² In another especially caustic editorial, entitled: "Alice in the Coal Fields," the Times circuitously praised the coal miners:

At least Alice had the sense to rebel. "I can't stand this any longer," she cried after her adventures through the looking glass. Hundred of thousands of Americans have been showing intelligence and courage on the field of battle. Why hasn't there been enough intelligence and enough moral courage among our representatives in Congress for them to speak out against this fantastic provision and to repeal it?³

The Tribune called the Smith-Connally Act--"a law to promote strikes." The editorial did note, however, that this was the unforeseen result of a well-intended proposal.⁴

Even at this early date, the summer of 1945, both the Tribune and the Times were hinting at amending the Wagner Act or introducing other legislation to compensate for what was felt to be undue leniency toward labor. The tone of the editorial opinion can be felt in this excerpt from the Times, describing proposed legislation which is unfriendly toward labor:

²New York Times, October 12, 1945, p. 22.

³New York Times, March 30, 1945, p. 14.

⁴Chicago Tribune, December 2, 1945, p. 20.

"... Senators Hatch, Ball, and Burton brought forth a proposed labor policy for the Government, which has been extemporizing in this field for many years."⁵

The post-war wage demands made by major unions and the clamorous strikes to gain their objectives left the public embittered against the powerful unions. New wage claims served to portray the unions as greedy and too willing to take advantage of their war torn employers.

The Portal-to-Portal Act

The Portal-to-Portal Act was passed at the height of a period when the cry for anti-union legislation was being heard more often than not. The expressed purpose of the law was to protect employers from law suits claiming unreasonable amounts in back wages. In some cases the demands were unreasonable to the extent that the employer would have been wiped out financially had he paid the claims of the unions. The Mt. Clemens Pottery case was the impetus for the quick passage of an obviously necessary law defining working time and compensable time. The case in point was the Anderson, et. al. v. Mt. Clemens Pottery Company.⁶ The United Pottery Workers of America charged the Company with violation of the Fair Labor Standards

⁵New York Times, June 21, 1945, p. 18.

⁶Anderson v. Mt. Clemens Pottery Company, 328 U.S. 680 (1947).

Act regarding remuneration for time the employees considered part of their working time. The problem arose because most of the employees were being paid on a piece rate basis, which meant that the time they spent actually getting to the place of work after dressing on the premises was not compensable time.

The decision of the court regarding the employees' claims was only resolved after a series of appeals. The original decision of the district court was in the employees' favor. However, this decision was over-ruled by the Circuit Court, which found the time delay uncompensable. An appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court led to another reversal but stipulated that the amount of remuneration would depend on the findings of a survey under the auspices of the Circuit Court. The final decision held that the time spent in getting to the job after dressing was not significant enough to be retroactively remunerated. This decision in favor of the company was appraised by the Times in the following manner:

Judge Picard's decision in the Mount Clemens Pottery Company case had not killed off all pending portal-to-portal suits, nor has it diminished the need for Federal legislation to keep such demands from reaching fantastic limits. But the effect has been wholesome.⁷

A Tribune editorial pointed out specifically what was commendable in its opinion about Judge Picard's decision:

...lay down two generalizations which commended themselves for their intelligence and reasonableness. These

⁷New York Times, February 14, 1947, p. 20.

were (1) that any meretorious suit should not be retroactive beyond June 10, 1946, when the Supreme Court handed down its interpretations of 'working time' as that time used in 'productive activities' and (2) that the doctrine of working time should not apply in the case of manufacturing as it does in such hazardous industries such as mining, unless it is 'substantial.'⁸

This confusion over working time and compensable time led to the passage of the Portal-to-Portal Act on May 14, 1947. The stated purpose of the law as stated by Congress follows:

An Act to relieve employers from certain liabilities and punishments under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as amended, the Walsh-Healy Act, and the Bacon-Davis Act, and for other purposes.⁹

Public opinion was strongly against labor's position on Portal pay. One editorial in the New York Times pointed out that with every new labor suit, labor is hurting its own public image and endangering its already unstable position with Congress:

Actually union labor loses something with every new suit that is announced, in terms of the balance of strength between those members of Congress who favor punitive labor legislation and those who counsel moderation. It would be difficult to conceive of anything better conceived to play into the hands of the reactionary element than this newest demonstration of short-sightedness on the part of union leaders.¹⁰

Another editorial in the New York Times summed up the public distaste for breaking the rules of fair play.

⁸ New York Times, April 4, 1947, p. 22.

⁹ Labor Law Course, (New York: Commerce Clearing House, 1964), p. 7213.

¹⁰ New York Times, January 4, 1947, p. 14.

But to introduce changes in the 'rules of the game' retroactively is an entirely different matter. Few persons will find it difficult to decide, as between the attitude of those unions which have started suits to obtain 'back pay' which they never contemplated receiving when they signed their contracts.¹¹

The issue of collective bargaining was brought up by the Times to remind organized labor of its own preferred method of solving labor-management relations problems.

In the end we hope that organized labor will realize that wages ought to be adjusted by collective bargaining, not by fantastic proceedings at law, and that this famous issue will be remembered only as an historic curiosity.¹²

The Tribune published a few letters from the public expressing, strongly negative opinions on the matter. One such letter sardonically suggested paying soldiers portal-to-portal pay.¹³ Another letter in the same vein had this to say:

I suggest that union labor bosses demand pay from their employers for time spent in their favorite barber shop, the time also to include portal-to-portal pay....After all, didn't their hair and whiskers do a large part of their growing on company property?¹⁴

One letter suggested an accounting system; the author agreed to portal-to-portal pay for both sides, but only under his accounting system. Time under this system would be accounted for and paid accordingly. For instance, time used for personal matters

¹¹New York Times, January 18, 1947, p. 14.

¹²New York Times, February 9, 1947, p. 8, IV.

¹³Chicago Tribune, January 3, 1947, p. 12.

¹⁴Chicago Tribune, February 8, 1947, p. 8.

would be deducted from company time.¹⁵ There was, of course, another side to this story, as made apparent by this letter to the Tribune:

I remember, when I worked in a large steel plant, my fellow workers and I were docked 15 minutes for any time over three minutes that we punched in late. I guess it all depends on who is wearing the shoe that pinches.¹⁶

The Case Bill

As the second wave of strikes was distressing the public and portal-to-portal claims were making labor unions look greedy, the 80th Congress was actively planning more retaliatory measures. This sample of editorial advice on legislation governing industrial affairs comes from the Tribune:

The continuous interference with national life and the persecuting of everybody by a very few labor leaders in key positions has become by far the greatest domestic problem of today. Congress cannot move too fast to free the American people from this tyranny.¹⁷

A week later, the Tribune reported with increased fervor:

The public is getting heartily sick and tired of picket lines. Pickets should be rigorously restricted to the peaceful exercise of that function. Congress is amending labor statutes that should strike out the one-sided provisions of existing laws which prevent the discipline and regulation of picketing, to see that it remains lawful.¹⁸

¹⁵ Chicago Tribune, February 6, 1947, p. 18.

¹⁶ Chicago Tribune, February 18, 1947, p. 18.

¹⁷ Chicago Tribune, May 2, 1947, p. 16.

¹⁸ Chicago Tribune, May 20, 1947, p. 18.

The New York Times was more specific in outlining its objections to existing legislation. First, the Times said, "...we concluded that the 'Wagner Act', in its present form, has tended to increase and prolong strikes..." This was followed by a negative appraisal of the National Labor Relations Board, which the Times said, "...makes it an easy and riskless undertaking to start and prolong strikes, whatever the cause of the strike or the conduct of the strikers."¹⁹

The Case Bill, submitted to President Truman May 29, 1946, was devised expressly to limit strikes. Foster Rhea Dulles described it as follows:

Among other features it set up a Federal Mediation Board, prescribed a sixty-day cooling off period before any strike could be called, decreed loss of their rights under the Wagner Act for any workers who in these circumstances left their jobs, banned both secondary boycotts and jurisdictional strikes, and authorized the use of injunctions to prevent violent or obstructional picketing.²⁰

A Tribune editorial expressed the hope that the Case Bill would be a test to determine the need for stronger measures:

The passage of the (Case) Bill would serve, at least, as a warning to union leaders that they don't own the country. If that warning isn't enough, Congress will have to go farther and flatly forbid strikes in public utilities and a few other essential industries, like coal.²¹

¹⁹New York Times, February 15, 1947, p. 14.

²⁰Dulles, p. 372.

²¹Chicago Tribune, May 4, 1946, p. 10.

Another editorial in the Tribune praised a portion of the bill which the Tribune felt was a sorely needed remedy for an unequivocal situation. That section, according to this editorial, made, "...labor unions and employers equally liable under law for violations of their contracts."²² The Times, however, was not so favorably disposed to the Case Bill. It especially objected to the idea of government seizure because: "It tends to erode the idea of private property."²³ The Case Bill was not passed because of the President's veto. Congress, however, did not intend to allow the matter of curbing union power to end there. Although the President was opposed to severe legislative measures, he did concur with Congress on some points:

President Harry Truman recognized the existing sentiment for change, and in his State of the Union message to Congress, on January 6, 1947, suggested action be taken to prohibit jurisdictional strikes and certain kinds of secondary boycotts. He also asked for the creation of more efficient machinery for the avoidance of strikes and lockouts. Finally, he recommended the appointment of a temporary joint commission to inquire into the entire field of labor-management relations and report back to Congress not later than March 15, 1947.²⁴

Both the House and the Senate moved quickly to formulize their objections to union activities and construct some sort of format for revising the current labor laws.

²²Chicago Tribune, February 3, 1946, p. 20.

²³New York Times, May 23, 1946, p. 20.

²⁴Taft, p. 579.

The Taft-Hartley Act

In April of 1947 the first drafts of a new labor law were being discussed in the press. An excerpt from one of the first Tribune editorials covering the proposed legislation follows:

Both the House and Senate have labor reform bills in committee. Both bills have excellent features and both have features of debateable merit. Both will be fought bitterly by organized labor on all points, good and bad, but it can be expected, and certainly it is to be hoped, that Congress will not be swayed by the protests of these special interests.²⁵

Reactions to the first drafts were very soon being hotly discussed in the press. The New York Times had the following reaction to Philip Murray's charges against the proposed legislation:

...there is nothing to justify the extravagant charge of Philip Murray, President of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, that the pending proposals represent the first step toward Fascism in the United States...As debate begins, the clear need is for legislation which is not anti-labor but anti-labor monopoly.²⁶

One vociferous spokesman for the labor faction, William Green, led a vigorous campaign against the Taft-Hartley in the New York press. The Times reported the statements made by Mr. Green, but summed up the comments in praise of the bill.

²⁵Chicago Tribune, April 12, 1947, p. 12.

²⁶New York Times, April 15, 1947, p. 24.

In a nation-wide broadcast the other evening, William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, repeatedly referred to the two labor bills which have been taken in charge by Senate-House conference committees as the Taft-Hartley slave-labor legislation.....²⁷

In the early stages of the Taft-Hartley Bill, the Times editorials were strongly opposed to the objections made by organized labor, as indicated by the following excerpt: "The Hartley Bill was never as bad as Mr. Green would have us believe, but it is a much better measure for the changes that have been written into it in conference committee..."²⁸ Mr. Green, in turn, became increasingly acrimonious in his replies, as in this letter:

Apparently, that is the difference between you and me. Your expressed opinion and attitude toward the Hartley and Taft anti-labor bills apparently are based on your academic logic and conclusions, influenced perhaps by a biased attitude toward the labor unions. My opinion is based upon realism, facts and lessons learned in the hard school of experience.²⁹

The Times recognized the resistance of organized labor to the proposed legislation and suggested the use of accepted methods in labor's fight. The following is evidence of this:

Labor is still determined to fight the measure and, if possible, force its repeal. Present prospects, however, are that the long battle will be waged only in the traditional American way, through courts and the ballot box.³⁰

²⁷ New York Times, September 1, 1947, p. 18.

²⁸ New York Times, May 28, 1947, p. 24.

²⁹ New York Times, May 28, 1947, p. 24.

³⁰ New York Times, June 29, 1947, p. 10, IV.

Another editorial confirmed the former observation regarding planned political action.

American labor has embarked upon a new political program and that its program in effect, if not in purpose, constitutes an attempt to form a political bloc. The occasion is the opposition of most labor leaders to the Taft-Hartley Act.³¹

The Times made another observation when it perceived the difference in attitude between the CIO and AFL regarding a course of action in opposing the Taft-Hartley Bill. The Times predicted this difference in attitudes would result in further dissension between the two groups.

Organized labor's opposition to the Taft-Hartley Law appeared to be taking such different practical forms that the new legal repressions may intensify the struggle between the two major union groups instead of driving them closer together as many observers had prophesied.³²

President Truman hesitated between advising Congress to pass the necessary measures and warning Congress against punitive legislation. His tone in a message to Congress exhibited this feeling of restraint in advising limiting union power.

But all this is one thing. It is quite another thing and a very necessary thing, to overhaul existing federal labor legislation--beginning with the Wagner Act--in order to weaken the power of artificially created monopolies and create the conditions which will foster more even-handed collective bargaining.³³

³¹New York Times, December 26, 1947, pl 14.

³²New York Times, June 28, 1947, pl 12.

³³New York Times, January 7, 1947, p. 26.

The Times did not view the forthcoming bill as punitive, but as necessary in this excerpt:

There has been little or no suggestion of anything, that could be described as 'punitive' legislation... in what that group seeks is not legislation which would outlaw strikes, but legislation which would make them unnecessary.³⁴

One indication of public opinion was a letter published by the Times asking for fair play.

What we call 'labor' is made up of citizens of the United States. What is 'punitive' about arranging our laws so that every citizen is subject to exactly the same rules and regulations? Isn't that the American way? Isn't that just ordinary fair play?³⁵

The following letter, strongly opposed to the proposed legislation, was somewhat unusual because of its authors---the letter was signed by twenty eminent professors of the top universities in the United States. This excerpt describes the area of their concern:

We strongly oppose any legislation which attempts to wipe out the gains made in the last decade granting the workers a somewhat more equal bargaining position with industry, and which proposes how to place workers economically at the mercy of their employers.³⁶

The New York Times seemed somewhat inconsistent in its attitude toward the Taft-Hartley Bill. On one occasion it favored the Senate bill, but not the House bill, as expressed by the following quotation:

³⁴New York Times, February 19, 1947, p. 24.

³⁵New York Times, February 7, 1947, p. 22.

³⁶New York Times, March 12, 1947, p. 24.

Mr. Hartley, of New Jersey, ventured the prediction that the final draft of this important legislation will drop both the proposed prohibition of industry-wide bargaining and the proposed authorization for private employers to seek injunctions against certain types of strikes...we hope that Mr. Hartley's forecast is correct.

We trust that the House conferees and behind them the House itself, will have the statesmanship to waive provincial pride and take the Senate bill with a few minor improvements, and take it promptly.³⁷

In another editorial, however, the Times expressed opposition to the bills of both Houses for the following reasons:

These bills before Congress, however, both the drastic Hartley Bill and the less extreme Taft Bill, would, to an extent not generally recognized, increase Government intervention, encourage resort to the National Labor Relations Board or the court, and prevent prompt settlement at home of many questions for which there is not real need for federal intervention.³⁸

The House of Representatives passed their bill by a "decisive majority of 308-102."³⁹ The Senate passed a less severe bill which the New York Times found to be an impressive indication of majority approval.

But the size of the majority it was able to command, 68 to 24, conveys a message which is too plain to be misread. In our opinion it is an effort which, in its general approach to the problem, reflects the democratic process at its best.⁴⁰

Since the bills passed by the two Houses were significantly different, the President appointed a committee to combine the provisions into a single bill.

³⁷ New York Times, May 16, 1947, p. 22.

³⁸ New York Times, May 6, 1947, p. 26.

³⁹ New York Times, May 7, 1947, p. 26.

⁴⁰ New York Times, May 14, 1947, p. 24.

While the two Houses of government were busy reaching a compromise, the press was pessimistic. A Times editorial observed that, "...much is heard of the possibility that these efforts will come to naught. That possibility stems from the fact that no one is quite sure what kind of legislation the President will approve and what kind would invoke his veto."⁴¹ Speculations were common that the President intended to veto the bill for political reasons. The Times has this observation to make:

Labor's prestige in legislation halls has fallen to a new low, yet its potential political influence has never been greater than today...If the political solidarity of organized labor is cemented in the coming months, some observers believe that the political swing of last year will be reversed.⁴²

This prediction made at the height of the anti-union public sentiment turned out to be a correct one. President Truman's political motives in vetoing the Taft-Hartley were not quite so favorably viewed by the press. The New York Times had this to say:

Most political observers agree that while Mr. Truman may not win in 1948 with the labor vote, he certainly cannot win without it.⁴³

The Times also made note of the fact that the President and many Senators were receiving a great deal of mail in support of

⁴¹New York Times, May 7, 1947, p. 26.

⁴²New York Times, May 4, 1947, p. 7, IV.

⁴³New York Times, April 20, 1947, p. 7, IV.

the President's intention to veto the proposed legislation. The Times did not seem to have any faith in opinions expressed through the mails.

Floods of telegrams are said to have descended on many anti-veto Senators, urging them to switch to the support of the President. The effort was nil...The reason for this is, of course, familiar. Floods and inundations of telegrams may be released on Congressmen by somebody pressing a button.⁴⁴

Another editorial suggested ignoring the mail and examining the election record of the House of Representatives during the last election.

Mr. Truman's mail, we are told, is running strongly in favor of a veto of the new labor bill which now awaits his action...Is it not fair to assume that the members of a House of Representatives elected on peacetime issues only have at least as good an understanding of what their constituents expect of them---if there is unfortunately to be a difference of judgement here---as has a President elected under the wartime conditions of 1944?⁴⁵

The Bill, as submitted by the conference, was passed in the Senate by a vote of 54 to 17, and in the House by a vote of 320 to 79.⁴⁶ The Times had this to say on the results of the vote: "It disarmed the more extreme and unreasoning of its critics (who, needless to say, are also the noisiest) of the weapon which up to this point has been their reliance."⁴⁷

⁴⁴New York Times, June 26, 1947, p. 22.

⁴⁵New York Times, June 11, 1947, p. 26.

⁴⁶Taft, p. 583.

⁴⁷New York Times, June 5, 1947, p. 24.

The President was, nevertheless, not satisfied with the bill and proceeded to veto it on June 20, 1947.⁴⁸ In expressing his reasons for vetoing the bill, the President called it "unworkable." The New York Times severely criticized the President for "inviting sabotage" by damaging the chances of the bill to prove itself.⁴⁹ A letter to the Tribune expressed this hostile opinion of the President's action: "The inconsistency of President Truman in his veto of the Taft-Hartley Bill, showed his absolute unfitness as the leading executive of our country."⁵⁰

The House wasted no time in overriding the Presidential veto. The Times seemed to express surprise and disappointment because the Senate did not follow suit, in spite of its previous objections to the bill as it stood. The Times' editorial comments on the Senate debate were:

When the House of Representatives voted to override the Presidential veto of the Taft-Hartley Labor Management Bill there seemed to be no obstacle to similar action in the Senate...This was not government by debate but by an attempt to thwart the will of a majority of Congress by power of nuisance.⁵¹

Another Times editorial seemed impressed with the voting record regarding the Taft-Hartley law, intimating that the measure must therefore have substantial value.

⁴⁸ New York Times, Taft, p. 583.

⁴⁹ New York Times, June 24, 1947, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Chicago Tribune, June 26, 1947, p. 18.

⁵¹ New York Times, June 22, 1947, p. 8, IV.

Actually, throughout the whole debate which sent this legislation to the President, the Taft-Hartley Bill commanded at all times majorities of three of four to one in both the Senate and the House--a record of vigorous bi-partisan support unmatched in the case of any other controversial measure of similar importance enacted into law in recent years.⁵²

The Tribune had praise for the newly enacted bill and for Senator Taft, who the Tribune felt to be largely responsible for perfecting the measure. "The bill as it emerged from conference and as it was eventually enacted is not a tough measure nor is it a soft measure. It is, above all, a workable law..."⁵³

The Times enumerated some of the basic provisions of the law, optimistically stating that they, "...may change the entire course of industrial relations."⁵⁴ The Tribune shared these sentiments in this statement: "The bill will give the nation the first fair and workable system of labor relations..."⁵⁵

Although the Labor-Management Relations Act was passed on June 23, 1947, it did not go into effect for a few months. Comparatively little was said about the new law by the press during the summer, perhaps in anticipation of the real test of operation in the fall. The opinions that were expressed during the summer were those of speculation or tapering expressions of dissatisfaction with unions.

⁵² New York Times, June 24, 1947, p. 22.

⁵³ Chicago Tribune, June 25, 1947, p. 16.

⁵⁴ New York Times, June 24, 1947, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Chicago Tribune, July 1, 1947, p. 16.

One letter to the Tribune explained why labor was dissatisfied with the "meritorious" Taft-Hartley Bill: "The hue and cry in labor ranks over the Taft-Hartley Bill is quite understandable when one considers its interference with the many high-handed practices of unions."⁵⁶ The Times, meanwhile, expressed the opinion that the law would benefit the individual workers if not the labor unions.

If unions, as such, have lost some freedom, workers have gained some freedoms. The labor union has come under a regulation comparable with that long exercised over the corporation--and for similar reasons.⁵⁷

Reactions, possibly violent ones, were expected from labor. However, the only group that responded with a strike to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act was the United Mine Workers Union. The Tribune observed that:

Within 24 hours after the Senate overrode the Truman veto of the Taft-Hartley Labor Law, John L. Lewis' soft coal miners began to drift out of the mines... This country is not going to allow 400,000 coal miners to blockade its bill.⁵⁸

The Times was in agreement with this contention adding that: "Elsewhere there have been no interruptions of work that could be described as 'protest strikes' against the law."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Chicago Tribune, June 26, 1947, p. 48.

⁵⁷New York Times, August 24, 1947, p. 8, IV.

⁵⁸Chicago Tribune, June 26, 1947, p. 48.

⁵⁹New York Times, August 10, 1947, p. 7.

When the law went into effect, the press again seemed impressed with the promising results the law had in store. This attitude is expressed by a typical editorial in the Tribune.

The Taft-Hartley law has been in effect for only a few weeks, but already it has some substantial achievements to its credit....The underlying purpose of Congress was to impose responsibilities on unions to match their privileges. It is still too early to say that Congress has wholly succeeded in reaching this goal, but the evidences to date are definitely encouraging.⁶⁰

But merits of the new law seemed to ebb as summer turned to fall. The press became less sure in its praises of the Taft-Hartley and the public less clamorous for punishment of striking workers and union leaders. One letter to the Times found the Taft-Hartley inequitable in its treatment of workers during a strike.

Employees who will be restrained by government injunctions from carrying on a strike will certainly bridle at the suggestion that there is equal protection under our laws when the Taft-Hartley law permits employers, as it does, to cut wages and reduce working conditions during the injunction period when workers are encased in legal strait-jackets.⁶¹

The New York Times, expressing a great deal of faith in the American sense of justice, advised unions to be optimistic and to expect the correction of the short-comings of the new law.

The labor union is an integral and necessary part of our industrial society. Its freedom and its obligations are those essential to democracy. If experience

⁶⁰Chicago Tribune, September 4, 1947, p. 20.

⁶¹New York Times, November 27, 1947, p. 30.

proves that the Taft-Hartley Act has violated any basic freedoms--and in one or two instances it may have done so--then that error will be corrected. Labor can trust the American public's sense of justice...Today, in spite of all past mistakes, present doubts, and incidental animosities, we can confidently wish the labor movement well.⁶²

In another editorial the Times found fault with certain Taft-Hartley provisions, adding that, a Congressional Committee to study the Taft-Hartley in operation was a positive step in appraisal of the new law.

Some changes, undoubtedly, like the 'non-communist' affidavit and the uncritical ban on political activity by unions, will eventually be rejected or modified; others may have to be de-emphasized or tightened up. But, in any case, we have now for the first time a complete labor law, an administrative body to carry out its provisions, and something unique and refreshing in our legislative experience--a Congressional Committee to watch the law in operation and be prepared to recommend changes if and when they seem to be called for.⁶³

In the post-Taft-Hartley year of 1948, the letters and editorials on unions were far less common than in the past two years. Some of the comments which did appear were concerned with specific provisions of the Taft-Hartley law. For instance, the Times was in complete sympathy with organized labor on the issue of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. An editorial indicated that the provision "...prohibiting a union newspaper from commenting editorially on political candidates is

⁶²New York Times, August 22, 1947, p. 14.

⁶³New York Times, September 1, 1947, p. 18.

an unconstitutional abridgement of freedom of speech..."⁶⁴

On the whole, the law was not seen as disfunctional or disruptive of normal union activities by the press. The New York Times reported the findings of a Congressional Committee on the six month progress of labor-management relations since the passage of the Taft-Hartley in this way:

It finds that strikes, in number, in man-days of idleness and total number of workers affected, have steadily declined in each successive month since the law became fully operative last August 22...But the six months record, on the whole, deserves the committee's appraisal that the law is working 'without undue hardships upon employer or employee'--even-handed collective bargaining.⁶⁵

A month later, the Tribune had these observations to make regarding the law in operation:

It (Taft-Hartley) isn't in any sense a tough law. It hasn't interfered with a single legitimate activity of the unions. It hasn't forbidden them to organize or to strike. We do not recommend union busting laws but nobody can prevent their enactment if the present abuses continue.⁶⁶

In June of 1948, after the Taft-Hartley had been in effect ten months, the Times stated that the law had not been in effect long enough to be due for major revisions, even though some sections were admittedly "unworkable." This editorial viewed favorably the following Congressional decision:

⁶⁴New York Times, March 16, 1948, p. 26.

⁶⁵New York Times, March 17, 1948, p. 24.

⁶⁶New York Times, April 3, 1948, p. 12.

The Joint Congressional Committee on Labor-Management Relations, which has been conducting hearings for the past week or more on the proposed amendments to the Taft-Hartley, had voted not to recommend any changes at the present sessions. That means, in all probability, it will not be reopened before 1949.⁶⁷

Nearing the end of the year, however, the Times published an article by Joseph Loftus under this headline: "One thing seems certain---the labor law will not remain as is."⁶⁸ A week later, an editorial advocating another position was published; regarding the proposed amending action, the Times objected to any changes in the Taft-Hartley with this thought: "We might as well learn as soon as possible whether we still have representative government in this country or whether Congress can be made to abdicate its functions."⁶⁹ This fluctuation indicated an obvious instability in editorial policy and possibly in public opinion as well. In other editorials the Times did not see the Taft-Hartley as equitable to management and labor. This excerpt seems to explain that position:

Equality of treatment under our laws has been a cherished tradition and its basic foundation. The provisions of the Taft-Hartley Law making it mandatory to see injunctions when labor unions violate the law and at the same time making it only discretionary when employers violate the same law is an imbalance which should be corrected before any more labor unions are destroyed.⁷⁰

⁶⁷New York Times, June 4, 1948, p. 22.

⁶⁸New York Times, November 21, 1948, p. 10, IV.

⁶⁹New York Times, November 28, 1948, p. 8, IV.

⁷⁰New York Times, October 4, 1948, p. 61

In another editorial the Times showed satisfaction with clarifications equitably defining both labor and management's positions.

Gradually, but surely, the rights of labor and management, respectively, under the Taft-Hartley Act, are being brought into clearer definition and focus through the decisions of the National Labor Relations Board.⁷¹

Although the spokesmen for organized labor seemed to be unanimously against the Taft-Hartley Act, there were some exceptions among the members. A letter signed "Union Member" appeared in the Tribune: "This law guarantees freedom for the individual worker. It prevents many an unnecessary strike. It safeguards unions and their survival. It protects the public welfare..."⁷²

The Democratic Party changed its opinion of the Taft-Hartley Act as indicated by the new party platform for the coming election. It seems that a section of the platform called for intensive study of the Taft-Hartley Act and possible repeal of the Act. The Times was not in complete agreement with the newly determined position of the Democratic Party. It cautioned the Democrats, reminding them of the last election results.

The 108 member resolutions committee of the Democratic Party has now approved the recommendation of a sub-committee calling for the outright repeal of the Taft-Hartley Labor Act.⁷³

⁷¹New York Times, October 26, 1948, p. 30.

⁷²Chicago Tribune, October 27, 1948, p. 22.

⁷³New York Times, July 14, 1948, p. 22.

Another editorial was suspicious of the motives of the Democratic Party in devising this change in policy.

This is a plain and unmasked bid for the 'labor vote' in the 1948 campaign; but such a maneuver is hardly consistent with the fact that 106 Democratic members of the House of Representatives voted to override the President's veto of this very legislation, whereas only 76 supported the veto.⁷⁴

The Tribune feared that the Democrats would disturb industrial peace by allowing a return to the days when the Wagner Act was supreme among labor laws.

The Democrats say they want to go back to the days when the Wagner Act governed labor relations, when only employers could be guilty of unfair labor practices, and when this country experienced a succession of protracted strikes.⁷⁵

The results of the November elections, however, were too obvious to be misinterpreted. A letter to the Times analyzed the meaning of the election in this way:

After one year of it (the Taft-Hartley Act), the American people have shouted 'enough.' Under our democratic system that should mean something. Perhaps a coalition of Dixiecrats and old guard Republicans can still thwart the will of the people. But it would not be healthy for America, nor those millions throughout the world who depend on the working success of democracy as the final hope of salvation.⁷⁶

⁷⁴New York Times, July 15, 1948, p. 22.

⁷⁵Chicago Tribune, July 17, 1948, p. 6.

⁷⁶New York Times, November 16, 1948, p. 28.

CHAPTER V

COMMUNIST INFILTRATION INTO UNIONS

After the first World War, Communism created a political problem of national scope and concern. One of the targets of Communism in the United States was the labor movement. The situation of the CIO, which required experienced organizers and leaders, provided the first major opportunity for Communism to entrench itself. Taft appraised the Communist appeal to organized labor in this way:

The formation of the CIO and the large demands its successes imposed upon the relatively few experienced leaders provided the Communists with an extremely favorable opportunity. Absence of trained staff and the lower level of trade union sophistication among the large masses of newly organized, gave Communist activists a fine opportunity to gain a following in the ranks of organized workers who had almost unanimously rejected their appeal.¹

The AFL, at that time, was composed almost completely of skilled laborers who were not as easily impressed by Communism. Therefore, the problem of Communism could not be discussed as an issue applicable to the labor movement as a whole. For instance, in 1945 the AFL decided not to participate in the International Trade Union Congress in London, a Communistic

¹Taft, p. 625.

labor organization; the Tribune noted this event by writing an article in praise of AFL labor policies.²

In 1946, Philip Murray, President of the CIO, brought the subject of Communism before the Executive Board. As a result, Murray gained authority to penalize non-compliant CIO unions. An investigating committee was formed and a statement of policy was adopted against interference by the Communist Party or other political parties in the affairs of the CIO.³ These moves by the CIO were important in establishing organized labor's opposition to Communism. Individual unions followed the lead of the CIO in attempting to rid themselves of Communistic ties.

In 1947 the Chamber of Commerce made public its study entitled: "Communism Within the Labor Movement," which the public discovered to be of limited use in shedding light on the activities of Communists in the United States. The study had this to say:

As of the present, said the Chamber, the problem of communism exists in scattered locals of the American Federation of Labor Unions, and in a more serious way in international unions as well as ⁴locals of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

According to the New York Times, William Green threatened America with the possibility of labor rejecting democratic

²Chicago Tribune, June 5, 1948, p. 16.

³Taft, p. 625.

⁴New York Times, March 13, 1948, p. 24.

ideals for Communism if the Taft-Hartley was passed.⁵ It is readily apparent, however, from these comments also appearing in the Times, about the possibilities of unification of the AFL and CIO, that he is thoroughly opposed to Communism:

William Green, President of the AFL, said he was frankly not optimistic about achieving amalgamation soon...This pessimism, he told reporters after a session of the Executive Council, sprang from the 'character of the men in control of some of these organizations.' He referred specifically to Communists in the Congress of Industrial Organizations.⁶

The Tribune intimated that Walter Reuther is in some way sympathetic to Communism in the following editorial:

In the auto workers' international are two factions so closely matched in strength that each strives to out-do the other in radicalism.⁷ (In this case, radicalism was used to mean Communism.)

The Tribune has been known to level the charge of "Communist" or radical whenever it felt an occasion called for the ultimate in vitriolic accusations. The charge was applied wherever the Tribune found a situation which was particularly objectionable, that is, when it did not meet with the Tribune's philosophy. For instance, the Tribune felt that the "communist controlled" American Labor Party and the Democratic Party lacked major differences.⁸

⁵New York Times, January 26, 1948, p. 8, IV.

⁶New York Times, September 12, 1948, p. 3.

⁷Chicago Tribune, January 26, 1948, p. 20.

⁸Chicago Tribune, September 2, 1948, p. 8.

Occasionally, the letters to the editor which appeared in the Tribune subscribed to a similar philosophy. For instance, this one was written by a union member who felt he was being forced to vote against his conscience:

Telling the union men what to think and how to vote is what was done by the Communists⁹ in Russia. Sidney Hillman follows the party line.

The original Hartley Bill, later altered and combined into the Taft-Hartley Act, contained a clause which provided for exclusion of former Communists from union office. The press devoted quite a few editorials to discussing this issue. The Times, for instance, opposed the provision for the reasons expressed in the following commentary:

Some of the ablest opponents of Communism in the whole trade movement are ex-Communists who are now disillusioned with that doctrine, and these men are in a position to fight Communism all the more effectively for the very reason that they know its tricks. To deny them positions of leadership in the labor movement simply because they were one Communists is as short-sighted as it is unfair.¹⁰

The following letter was written in answer to that editorial:

In fact, your recommendations, if followed, would help the Communist cause more than anything else that has come out of Washington since 1933. The Communists in labor unions are too numerous. They neither can nor want to go underground.¹¹

The section of the Taft-Hartley Act calling for unions to denounce Communist affiliation by signing an affidavit to that

⁹Chicago Tribune, September 1, 1948, p. 26.

¹⁰New York Times, May 22, 1948, p. 26.

¹¹New York Times, June 2, 1948, p. 24.

effect caused a great deal of tribulation in labor circles. An editorial in the New York Times expressed this opinion:

We agree with this point of view. We should like to point out, further, that bad laws also make hard cases, and urge, as we have done before, that this section of the Labor Act Taft-Hartley be amended so as to clear away any possible doubt that it has any intent of interfering with the right to free expression of opinion.¹²

However, a few months later, the Times seemed to hold a different point of view:

Certainly, considering the subversive activities of international Communism, the question of alleged Communist domination of an American trade union is an appropriate subject of investigation, and certainly the political affiliations of the officials of that union are relevant to the matter under inquiry.¹³

In an article appearing in the Times, Louis Stark made this positive observation on labor's practical philosophy toward Communism: "Resentment against Communist activities in the labor movement is steadily increasing among the rank and file of American trade unionists."¹⁴ The Chicago Tribune, on the other hand, seems to have felt a number of unions were in a position to be accused of Communist affiliations. Starting at the top of the list, the leadership of the CIO falls into that category.

Neither does the rank and file of the CIO share its leaders' hopes that the American economic system will be replaced by one drawn from Marxian blueprints....

¹²New York Times, June 26, 1948, p. 16.

¹³New York Times, September 17, 1948, p. 24.

¹⁴New York Times, November 16, 1948, p. 10, IV.

any politician who accepts either the endorsement or the support of the CIO should be defeated for that reason alone.¹⁵

In other editorials the Tribune made similar statements regarding the leadership of the CIO. "In all of this tumult within the CIO's leadership there is not the slightest indication that any of the disputants has the slightest patriotic interest in the United States."¹⁶

The Packinghouse Workers were also under severe attack by the Tribune. One especially caustic editorial left no room for mercy.

Some of the local officials of the packinghouse workers are Communists...Many other leaders of the packinghouse workers, including most of the international officers, are not Communists. The only plausible explanation of their behavior is that they are plain fools.¹⁷

After the AFL faction settled their dispute, the Tribune made a distinction between the two groups of packinghouse workers.

Mr. March is district director of the striking CIO union in Chicago. He is also a member of the national committee of the Communist Party...The AFL union of packinghouse workers found no difficulty in coming to terms on a new wage scale.¹⁸

When the CIO strike failed, the Tribune seemed to find justice in the failure.

¹⁵Chicago Tribune, September 17, 1948, p. 20.

¹⁶Chicago Tribune, February 27, 1948, p. 18.

¹⁷Chicago Tribune, January 11, 1948, p. 20.

¹⁸Chicago Tribune, March 20, 1948, p. 14.

The considerable Communist bloc in the union leadership, while evading responsibility for the strike, took an active part in organizing the lawlessness which brought the union into national disrepute.¹⁹

One Tribune editorial seems to have separated its factual report from its conclusions on the basis that CIO unions can not be completely free from Communist influence. The CIO, having purged itself of a good number of its Communist bosses, still remains a dangerous political and economic force in America.²⁰

The public indignation aroused by the press seems to have compelled at least one union to publicly clarify its position. The following letter was signed by the Acting Recording Secretary of the United Farm Equipment Workers:

We don't feel that we should answer for the actions of any local except our own. Local 108, one of the largest CIO locals in the city and the largest in the Farm Equipment Workers Union, led the fight for compliance with the Taft-Hartley Act. We were the first to demand that our officers sign non-Communist affidavits....

The editors' comments: The National leadership of the UFEW has consistently reflected Communist influence.²¹

¹⁹Chicago Tribune, May 24, 1948, p. 14.

²⁰Chicago Tribune, August 22, 1948, p. 20.

²¹Chicago Tribune, September 4, 1948, p. 8.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

A brief review and summation of the events occurring during the four years under observation should draw into a better perspective the obvious and permit certain analyses to be made using the evidence contained in the body of the thesis.

A definite trend appears which can be divided into four stages. The first stage is the wartime period, during which organized labor was praised for its cooperation and contribution to the war effort. The press carried stories of the sacrifices of the working man and the public expressions of praise and gratitude of important government figures. The wartime stories were reported, however, with mixed emotions of sympathy and reprimand. The end of the war signaled an immediate shift in positions and attitudes setting the stage for the second phase. Organized labor felt justified in striking for higher wages to balance the price increases. Management felt it had been limited by government restrictions long enough and demanded the return of its management rights. The government, unprepared for the end of the war, antagonized everyone by refusing to lift wage and price controls. Expressions of unfriendly public reactions were aimed at the striking unions who were

complicating the process of production of sorely need civilian goods. Public indignation was most severely aroused by the prospect of a coal shortage.

The calm at the end of the strike wave of 1946 was ended when the pressure of price increases prompted organized labor to demand wage increases again. The second wave of strikes was announced half a year after the first wave ended.

The third stage was set by this new series of wage demands and the ensuing work stoppages. The result of this action on the part of organized labor was a public demand for a reprisal by the government. The public saw to it that the retaliation would occur by electing the conservative 80th Congress. The Labor-Management Relations Act was passed with much haste over the veto of President Truman in June of 1947.

Although unions were in a state of shock and confusion as to how they should react, they did take heed and corrected some of the faults pointed out by the Taft-Hartley Act. For instance, the accusation of "Communist" was taken very seriously and both houses of organized labor commenced to purge themselves of the undesirable elements.

The initial shock of the magnitude of the negative legislation contained in the Taft-Hartley Act seemed to have hurt the spirit of organized labor to the core. However, these feelings were apparently vented by the unions before the law actually went into operation in the early fall of 1947. Although the

feeling of justification was initially prevalent in management and government circles as expressed by the press, it soon gave way to a certain degree of public regret for the hasty and vindictive measures included in the Taft-Hartley Act.

The fourth stage was brought on by expressions of regret and statements by certain sectors of the government, like the Democratic Party, indicating a desire to repeal, if not the whole law, at least certain objectionable sections. The later part of 1947 and all of 1948 were marked by tranquility and almost a complete absence of unfriendly comments by the press.

The growth of union membership corresponds with these four stages. The first stage, during which public opinion can be said to have veered toward a positive attitude, had a growth rate of 1.5%.¹ In the second stage, during which public opinion grew steadily more negative, unions had a growth rate of 2%. During the third stage, the climax of negative feelings toward unions, organized labor accumulated an 8.8% growth in membership. Finally, in the docile fourth stage, unions exhibited a growth rate of a meager 0.5%.

These figures indicate a negative correlation between adverse public opinion and union growth. This finding should be more closely examined. Although adverse public opinion did not

¹The four stages under discussion correspond with the years 1945 through 1948. The growth rates quoted are those of Bernstein and are found on page 304 of his previously cited study.

directly produce a downturn in union growth, it did result in restricted labor legislation, the Taft-Hartley Act. The events immediately preceeding, as well as following, the passage of the law really fall into its shadow.

The public reacted to organized labor by enacting the Taft-Hartley Act; unions reacted to the law by significantly reducing their growth rate. The actions of the parties concerned fall into a pattern of stimuli and consequent reactions.

In examining the period in question, we find first that a fertile growth atmosphere existed immediately after the war, which served to enhance the chances of growth. The combination of the favorable attitudes of the executive and judicial branches of government and the post-war boom of the business cycle serves to create a positive atmosphere. Also, the structure of union organization had been nurtured and strengthened through the protection of wartime government policies; and, the union membership had the added advantage of being guided by aggressive leaders.

It is crucial to understand that both management and organized labor felt deprived during the war. Initially, unions seemed to be the aggressors, since they were demanding the changes, while managements might have settled for the status quo. As the aggressive tendencies of unions increased, the seeds of revenge and vengeance were planted in management, which, in turn, sowed its feelings with the government. The press, and,

it must be assumed, the public, grew increasingly to favor the management cause, which was borne out in the elections. A conservative Congress was elected, whose ultimate goal was to enact severely restricting legislation. As this feeling of animosity grew on the part of management and the public, unions were necessarily placed in a defensive position. Since all workers, not only organized workers, were feeling the pressure, they joined forces against the hostile opposition. As a result, membership rates grew substantially as long as the opposition continued the negative pressure. When the negative public opinion culminated in the passage of punitive legislation, negative expressions of opinion ceased. The goal had been achieved.

Anything happening after the passage of the Taft-Hartley was obviously the reaction of the conqueror and the conquered, respectively. The public seemed to express mixed emotions of satisfaction for justice achieved and a certain amount of regret for revenge achieved. The feelings of unions were left bare; they had been defeated by the severity of the measure advocated by the public and enacted by the government. Workers were not anxious to carry their union banners very high; instead, they suffered rebuke and disparagement silently and passively during the year, which showed a severe downturn in union growth.

The climate of public opinion as expressed by the press had a definite influence on the events of this period. Indirectly, the press is largely responsible for union growth because of its rate in furthering the efforts of parties concerned with passing the Taft-Hartley Law. The two newspapers differed in their editorial positions on specific issues; however, the trend was undoubtedly pro-management during the two years preceeding the Taft-Hartley Act. That is not to say that either the Times or the Tribune were biased. They merely reflected and enhanced the public thought on union-management issues.

Both dailies spurred the Congress by editorializing on the need of haste to pass the law. Both newspapers also found clauses worthy of criticism, but seemed to express the thought that these objectionable clauses merely needed slight editing or simply re-wording. In essence, both the Times and Tribune were in agreement about the necessity and the value of the Taft-Hartley Act. The Portal-to-Portal issue also obtained complete agreement between the two papers. The Smith-Connally Act was one issue which mucked a steady tirade from the Times, but very little reaction from the Tribune.

The Communist issue was unique in its position with the newspapers. The Tribune was very staunch in its disapproval of everything that was tinged by Communism. It sometimes made the assumption that highly objectionable (to the Tribune) situations

were Communist inspired. The Times, on the other hand, was not quite so intense in its criticisms of organized labor's pitfalls into Communism.

Certainly any strong statement made by a large metropolitan newspaper will cause concern and comment. When a newspaper feels it should back the public in a "cause," this form of news media becomes very powerful. To reiterate, the two newspapers were not directly responsible for reflecting the sort of public opinion which caused fluctuations in union growth directly. One can be assured, however, that the climate of public opinion leading to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act and the resultant reactions of organized labor were reflected by these two newspapers.

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